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Cinderella and Her Sisters

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The problem of Flemish children's literature, typical of a minor cultural community or a dominated system, can serve as a model for other cultural systems that find themselves in an unequal relationship with an allied but stronger system. Minor cultures like the Flemish, which has such a relationship with the Dutch culture, have a limited readership for their children's books, as these are seldom translated and, hence, never gain international fame. However, they still need a history of their own production. In order to construct a realistic picture of that production, therefore, it is important to see how and why these cultures are dominated by more forceful ones. Historiography has been discussed extensively during the second half of this century, and parties to this discussion are united in their uneasiness regarding the shortcomings of traditional methods and existing theories. The hitherto unassailable belief in the reconstruction of the past through the gathering of facts, names, and other data has given way to a new approach which views history as an adaptation or construction (see Newton-Smith 1981; Jauss 1967; Schmidt 1985; Ort 1985; Rusch 1985).

With regard to the historiography of children's literature, particularly that of a minor culture, even the most basic data are often incomplete. In these cases, selection and combination of the data become major problems, as selection is conditioned primarily by the availability of data. Texts pertaining to the field of children's literature, as well as bibliographical information and reception documents, are often lost

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or unobtainable. For instance, in a study by Jan van Coillie (1988) in which 874 titles were listed, only 462 could be found; time and chance had made the first selection.

In this article I will argue for a history of children's literature which does not sidestep the issues of historical construction in favor of the mere collation of information. Neither the large number of facts nor the inaccessibility of forgotten texts, nor indeed theoretical demands, can serve as an excuse for putting off this job. Moreover, as a spokeswoman for a minor culture, I will argue for the opening up of national historiography and for viewing children's literature in a broader context.

Why Investigate Historiography?

It was 1983 before a bio-bibliography of nineteenth-century Flemish children's literature was published (Loots 1983). Until 1988 there had been no serious historical study done on Flemish children's literature, aside from some small-scale surveys which often more closely resembled selection lists composed with pedagogical intentions, such as those of Ger Schmook (1934) and Hendrik van Tichelen (1952). Jan van Coillie's voluminous study (1988) on nineteenth-century children's literature changed the situation considerably. In this doctoral dissertation, Van Coillie described children's literature as a system in continual interaction with adult literature, on the one hand, and with pedagogics, on the other. There is still, however, no extensive historical survey of twentieth-century Flemish children's literature. Hence, the first and foremost reason for extending the historical enterprise is the need to assemble and study documents before they are obliterated by time. Moreover, no one but us will write our history. Minor cultures are usually treated in a very "stepmotherly" way in surveys of European or international literature (Hürlimann 1967; Jan 1969; Avery 1975; Ottevaere-van Praag 1987; Heimeriks and Van Toorn 1989). Ganna Ottevaere-van Praag compiles Dutch literature under thirty categories (including authors of adult books): Flemish literature is only mentioned in the introduction. According to her, there was no Flemish literature at all during the years between 1870 and 1925.

In Flanders, at least during the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, the French-speaking bourgeoisie provided its children with French books. The masses, however, spoke the Flemish dialect and the first fairy tales for children, published in 1869 (*Oude Kindervertelsels* by Alphonse Lootens), were written in the Bruges dialect. Even if Flemish readers had been able to overcome the linguistic problem, they still would not have been in favor of the distribution of children's books coming from the Protestant Netherlands. This situation would change when Dutch culture spread among the privileged classes; the young began reading stories by Dutch authors and by some Flemish authors,

such as Hendrik van Tichelen, Stephanie Verzele-Madeleyn, and Jef Mennekes (see Ottevaere-van Praag 1987: 26). These three authors wrote during the second quarter of the twentieth century. Ottevaere-van Praag found her information on Dutch and Flemish literature in works by Elize Knuttel-Fabius (1906), L. J. Th. Wirth (1926), and D. L. Daalder (1976 [1950]). None of these Dutch historians pays any serious attention to Flemish literature. Schmook (1934), the only Flemish authority in Ottevaere-van Praag's bibliography, did not intend to write a history at all, but wished to provide teachers and parents with a selective guide to good books.

Van Coillie's (1988) study has enabled us to map out what remains of Flemish children's literature. At the same time, his work discloses the risks involved in setting up national boundaries, which in the particular case of Flemish literature results in an uncomplicated, flattering picture. Nettie Heimeriks and Willem van Toorn (1989) continue the "stepmotherly" treatment of Flemish literature. In their new historiography, less than fifty of its 710 pages are devoted to Flemish children's literature, and only one of the sixteen members of the editorial staff is Flemish.

The most convincing reason for engaging in historical research has been stated by S. J. Schmidt:

"History" is regarded as a cognitive construction of present subjects serving the purpose of organizing their memory in a narrative way. . . . Literary histories develop models for the origins and change of variants of literary processes in literary systems, for their pre-suppositions, components, developments, value systems, media, etc., in order to provide arguments for recognizing grievances of the present literary systems and changing them. (Schmidt 1985: 293)

Schmidt, in fact, touches the nerve of the problem: the main grievance of the field of Flemish children's literature is its underdog position. Any literary history which chooses to overlook this problem runs the risk of distorting the situation and misleading the reader. Again, the problem is more pressing for minor than for major cultures. In English, German, or French literature, one is forced to narrow one's selection of texts to include only the most important names, due to the extensive amount of data. Even without epigones and marginal authors, one is left with an interesting group of important, internationally acclaimed (i.e., translated) authors. In minor cultures, international fame is reserved for only a happy few. Their sparsely populated history is often, in its isolation, colored more favorably than it should be.

The Underdog Situation, Or the Theory of Unequal Development

The relationship between the Flemish and the Dutch cultural systems is asymmetrical. The French economist François Perroux (1969) de-

nies in his theory of the dynamics of inequality that exchange is based on equality, and he stresses asymmetrical relations as standard: Economic relations are always based on a combination of exchange and power. Through the effect of domination, growth becomes unbalanced and conflictual. The obscuring of power structures and structural inequalities is always in the interests of the dominating system. The dominated system requires insight and an image of its desired future in order to respond to the stimuli of its environment. The economic system is structured like other cultural systems, and inequality can be modified, in part or even completely, by the government, entrepreneurs, or consumers.

Analyses carried out for the years 1965 (Broeckx 1986), 1975 (De Fre 1987), and 1985 (Maes 1988) indisputably reveal the “Cinderella” status of Flemish children’s literature. In 1965, 64.5 percent of the supply of Flemish children’s literature consisted of untranslated books. Within this group, 58 percent was originally Dutch and 41 percent, Flemish. Proportionally, Dutch books accounted for 37 percent of the total supply and Flemish, for 27 percent. In 1975, the supply of untranslated books dwindled to 60 percent, while the supply of Dutch books rose to 72 percent, with Flemish books making up 27.1 percent. The Dutch portion expanded to 42.5 percent, while the Flemish portion reached a mere 17.2 percent. In 1985, this trend developed further: the supply of untranslated books was reduced to 58.2 percent. Dutch books comprised 75.4 percent and Flemish, –25.4 percent, or 43.35 percent and 14.7 percent, respectively, of the total distribution of children’s books (see Figure 1).

The cultural system described here pertains to an economic situation. Although Flemish children’s literature is in the process of gaining recognition in literary circles, the growing influence of Dutch books and their “quality” label cannot be overcome. This is confirmed by the converse fact that there is virtually no filtering through of Flemish books into the Dutch market. The annual *Boek en Jeugd* (1973) listed thirty-five Flemish books, forty-nine Frisian, and 1,735 Dutch. This could be called a case of cultural colonization: Inequality in the supply of children’s books, like economic inequality, is the outcome of the cultural policies of leading groups and their influence on critics, publishing houses, and consumers. It would be interesting to look more deeply into the matter of cultural inequality to verify whether a similar dynamic operates in other literary subsystems, such as poetry or drama, or in affiliated artistic systems, such as music or painting.

The religious war in the seventeenth century led a large group of intellectuals, artists, and merchants to leave the Spanish-dominated part of modern Belgium and settle in the north. After the Treaty of Münster, the Netherlands became independent and subsequently

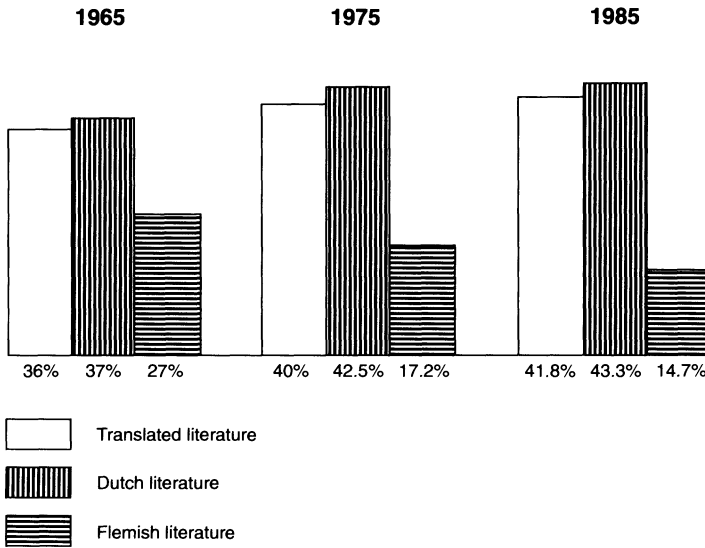


Figure 1. Relations among Flemish, Dutch, and translated books from 1965 to 1985.

developed a more cohesive cultural system. The development of the vernacular language was positively influenced by the Protestant religion through translation of the Bible into the vernacular. The southern provinces remained Spanish and Catholic; later, they were assigned to the Austrians, then occupied by the French. Lack of political independence left its mark on the cultural system. The gap between the imported culture of the dominant group and the relatively impoverished indigenous products grew increasingly wider.

The cultural situation at the beginning of the nineteenth century was distressing. The upper classes had become completely Frenchified and estranged from the original Flemish culture. The dominant cultural and intellectual system was the French one: Even countries with strong cultural systems, such as England and Germany, had come under the influence of French culture. All over Europe, French books were in print. For Flanders, this was a brief period of Dutch government (1815–1830) which would turn the tide. The reorganization of the school system became the most important factor in this recovery of the cultural system. The building of a network of primary and secondary schools which used Dutch as their teaching language and the importing of Dutch teachers, schoolbooks, and children's books gave the new generation a chance to reclaim their lost cultural background. The first group of Dutch writers would spring from this generation of children. The teachers' seminary at Lier, for instance, left its mark

on the literary life. The publishing house Van In had close ties to the seminary, and several teachers and former pupils went on to have literary careers (e.g., Johannes B. Courtmans). Flemish language and culture supported by the political and educational system regained a certain status, but it remained secondary.

The Late Start of Flemish Children's Literature

The late start of Flemish children's literature is hardly surprising if one considers the cultural context outlined above. In the first half of the nineteenth century twenty-three authors writing for children could be noted: thirteen teachers, five priests, and three civil servants (an archivist, a clerk, and a judge). Most of them were educated partly under the Dutch government, and their positions afforded them the opportunity to keep in touch with Dutch texts. The majority of these authors wrote for both adults and children, which explains the strictly parallel development of, and close affinity between, adult literature and children's literature in the nineteenth century (Van Coillie 1988). The favored genres were fables, poems, playlets, and saints' lives. All texts were first and foremost edifying and devotional, functioning primarily in school contexts, with playlets, for example, being enacted on prize-giving days to enliven the festivities. Many of these texts have disappeared because their function was exclusively occasional. If we regard Prudens van Duyse as the first author for children who produced texts with a certain literary quality, then 1844 can mark an inaugural event in Flemish children's literature—the start of our own canon.

This is indeed a late start in comparison with other European countries where children's literature had already begun to flourish during the eighteenth century. In England children's literature has a much longer tradition. Isaac Watts's *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* appeared in 1715, and John Newbery commenced his activities in 1744. Important authors like Thomas Day and Maria Edgeworth were published in the eighteenth century. In Germany, C. F. Weisse's *Der Kinderfreund* dates from 1775 to 1784, and the works of Charles Perrault, Madame le Prince de Beaumont, and Madame de Genlis were already popular in France. H. van Alphen (1778), considered the first Dutch author for children, published his *Kleine Gedigten*, and in 1781, Van Alphen's publisher announced more than 100 titles for children. By 1850, however, Flemish children's literature consisted of about fifty-eight titles.

Within this group Van Duyse was almost the only one who could compare with J. P. Heye and J. Gouverneur, two Dutch contemporaries. Van Duyse, who graduated from the University of Ghent, wrote for both adults and children, mainly in Flemish but also in French. He was in touch with many Dutch and German authors and

received several awards. Van Duyse rose high above his Flemish contemporaries. When Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter* was published in Germany in 1844, it struck a contrast to the sweet, amiable children in Van Duyse's work, yet his interest in legends and fairy tales was new and perfectly in line with the European trend.

The delay due to this late start and the resulting cultural vacuum would be felt, with the exception of a few authors, until the end of the nineteenth century. Although the number of children's books increased sharply in the last quarter of the century, there was a slower and more gradual change in tone and approach. Flemish children's literature remained in essence a proselytizing genre, only gradually embracing the story and the novel. Before the end of the century there were only a few boys' books. The first domestic tales in which a boy was featured as a main character date from the end of the century, for instance, A. Callant's *Zwarte Willem en andere verhalen* (1893), L. van Nerum's *Uit het kinderleven* (1897), and A. Hertoghs's *Dolf en Fientje* (1897). But there were almost no girls' books or adventure stories, although both genres were popular in other countries: girls' books in Germany, and adventure stories in England and America, France and Germany. This gap in the production of Flemish books for children would eventually be filled by imported literature, and in the twentieth century these new genres would be imitated by Flemish authors. Thus, until late in the twentieth century, the main body of Flemish production has been rather secondary, considered in a broader international context. Only a few authors, such as Van Duyse, have been affiliated with broader European trends. Often, Flemish production lagged behind, using obsolete models and genres. The translations, adaptations, and imitations of J. H. Campe, C. von Schmidt, and K. G. Nieritz illustrate this state of affairs. And even when new genres were introduced by means of translations, original books in Flemish have depicted such changes very slowly.

The Place of Flemish Texts

The inauguration of Flemish children's literature, however late, is a cause for rejoicing. The study of these texts' production and reception will give us a more realistic view of the situation at hand. Flemish children's literature remained second-rate throughout the nineteenth century. Since, at the beginning of the century, there was hardly any tradition of publishing (Simons 1984), Flemish book production then consisted of people's annuals and "blue books," made and distributed by printers. During the Dutch period there were different forms of cooperation between Flemish and Dutch firms, but Flemish leaders would blame this on the high price of Dutch books in comparison to French ones. Cultural competition also had an economic aspect. After

independence (1830), publishing houses continued their cooperation, or joint activities. The publisher J. Hoste (Ghent) published books jointly with the Dutch firms of Roelants (Schiedam) and T. J. Holkema (Amsterdam).

It is striking how often texts for children were produced by unimportant publishers. Frequently, the authors themselves acted as publishers (Mussely-Boudewijn), or else they gave their texts to local printers. Important publishing houses like the liberal firm Vuylsteke offered only a few original Flemish texts alongside a broad range of translations. Vuylsteke started his publishing activities in 1875; his list included translations of Perrault, A. Berquin, Nieritz, Jules Verne, J. F. Cooper, and Frederick Marryat. Van der Schelden, Snoeck-Ducaju, and Deseyn-Verhoegstraten published translations, but they could not compete with Dutch firms like Elsevier, Slythoff, Van Goor, or Versluys. In his book *Een en ander uit de Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Literatuur voor de Jeugd*, H. N. van Kalken (1910), an authority on education and children's literature, mentions only one translation published by a Flemish firm as opposed to ninety-two published by Dutch firms. These numerous translations either filled the somewhat lopsided supply or enhanced the position of certain groups. The translations of the German Catholic author Canon von Schmidt in the last quarter of the century, for example, can be explained as a strategic move in the conflict between Catholics and Liberals.

The fact that the competition between original and imported books often occurred at the expense of Flemish children's books is further confirmed by an examination of reception documents. The selection lists published by the government or by church authorities are of great interest in this respect because they provide insight into what these institutions considered "good reading material." In 1845, the first list of books recommended for class teaching or as prize books was published by the government. This list is not entirely flattering to Flemish literature.

	<u>French</u>	<u>Dutch</u>	<u>Flemish</u>
Books for class teaching	21	—	28
Prize books	—	19	8

In subsequent years, both government and church selections clearly showed the dominance of French children's literature. The government publication of 1852–54 contains fifty-three French titles and thirty-eight Flemish titles. The most extensive list, the 1882–84 publication, contained 687 French books (60.6%), 366 Flemish/Dutch books (30.3%), and 79 German books (6.9%). Of the French books, 208 were written in Belgium; 479 were imported. Only 66 titles were from the Netherlands (Van Coillie 1988: 386–88). Flemish children's

literature was dominated in the first place by imported French literature. This situation prevailed until the educational system became completely Dutchified in the first quarter of the twentieth century, while the second half of this century has been characterized by the growing importance of English, German, and Scandinavian books.

On the other hand, there was rivalry with Dutch literature and publishing. Going by the lists, the Dutch influence seems to have diminished in the course of the nineteenth century. The authority of the Catholic Church, which tried to ignore Protestant publications, as well as the growing number of Flemish books may explain this evolution. As for schoolbooks, however, the direction of development was quite the reverse. Toward the end of the century, the influence of Dutch authors, such as Heye, G. W. Lovendaal, Van Alphen, and Gouverneur, increased a trend that would develop further in the twentieth century, culminating in the recent tendency to include more and more children's and adolescent literature.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study of translations, including analysis of the historical moment of translation, and the study of reception documents (e.g., selection lists or reviews) that shed light on the process of canonization are important in opening up the historiography of minor cultures to more realistic images of their children's literature. When a history limits itself to an examination of geographically internal texts and to those responsible for their production, a misleading picture may emerge. Even more so than adult literature, children's literature evolves from international, rather than national, paradigms; demarcating different spheres of influence and following market fluctuations, the study of minor cultures promises to play an undeniably important role in the international historiography of children's literature.

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